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ABSTRACT

Documents produced by international organizations attached to the United Nations sometimes create problems in their great variety of publication practices, but most have the objectives of producing information for use internationally, of improving standards and methods, and of making statistics more comparable. Generally, information is obtained by sending questionnaires to the relevant departments in the countries, but for the developed countries the national statistical publications contain more information. The changed political representation of China has caused problems in statistical data. Most reference to international documents can be found in "International Bibliography, Information, Documentation." (WH)

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Documents of International Organizations—Their Nature and Availability

In the brief time at my disposal, I can touch upon only some of the salient aspects of international documentation in the United Nations system of organizations, especially with respect to publications offered for sale, and subscription periodicals. I shall pass over the thornier questions of unpriced mimeographed working papers and meeting records, and the priced official records or proceedings which eventually appear, and include selected meeting records and working papers.

I assume that this audience is generally aware that the United Nations and the fifteen "specialized agencies" comprise the United Nations system. It also includes various institutes, development banks, and other bodies related to or supported by the system, which enjoy varying degrees of autonomy.

All of them are intergovernmental organizations and all of them work on a global or regional scale. Their publications, however processed and distributed, are international government documents. Because this material is published separately by autonomous organizations, with no uniform or common practice as to availability, pricing, deposit, or exchange arrangements, etc., it presents problems to librarians. The problems have been further complicated by the failure of standard national bibliographic services—both commercial and governmental—to list this material completely and systematically, and of standard periodical indexes to deal adequately with intergovernmental periodicals.

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I should like to say a few words about the character of the surveys and studies, the "state of the art" reports, and the technical reports and collections of papers in proceedings of scientific panels and conferences in the areas in which the United Nations system is at work.

The international point of view is the distinguishing characteristic of these publications. The membership of each organization comprises most of the countries of the world, and the professional staff of each secretariat is itself made up of many nationalities. Surveys and studies carried out by secretariat staff express a consensus of work of several experts of different national backgrounds, or when prepared by an individual staff member may reflect his experience in several countries.

The world organizations bring together experts from many countries to serve on technical commissions, committees, panels, and working groups in their specific fields, in order to determine standards and methods of international validity and to make recommendations for national action. Their recommendations are sometimes discussed in seminars and workshops throughout the world, and the results may be disseminated to the developing countries, tested as to their applicability to specific national and regional situations, and modified by comment and criticism. There is also collaboration between the agencies (as between experts of different disciplines) when a subject so requires.

One of the principal objectives of these publications is to improve the quality of technical standards and methods, including agreed definitions, and international comparability of statistics.

There has been a continuous effort to improve the reliability, frequency, and depth of coverage of national statistics, and to achieve agreement on

definitions and standards which would allow international comparability. One may note that UNESCO, which began its work in 1946, brought out after a great deal of preparatory work its first Statistical Yearbook for 1963. The Statistical Yearbook of the United Nations is a sampling of major statistical series published by the organizations of the United Nations system. If the reader wishes for greater depth of coverage than that which this Statistical Yearbook provides, he can consult other statistical publications, such as the United Nations Demographic Yearbook and Yearbook of International Trade Statistics, the Unesco Statistical Yearbook, the FAO Trade Yearbook, Production Yearbook, Yearbook of Fishery Statistics, Yearbook of Forest Products, the ILO Year Book of Labour Statistics, the IMF Balance of Trade Yearbook, the WHO World Health Statistics Annual, and many others.

None of these publications, of course, will give more statistical information about Canada, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, and other developed countries than national statistical publications of these countries.

Official government statistics are the source of data for these year-books and are supplied in response to questionnaires drawn up by the organizations and returned by the appropriate office of the Member State.

The current statistical treatment of the "Republic of China," that is, of Taiwan, is a reminder that intergovernmental organizations are political organizations—even the most technical of them—and the decisions of the principal organ concerning the program and budget of the organization and other matters of policy are political acts. Furthermore, as I have already noted, the organizations accept for their statistical compilations the data

returned by official government departments. The acceptance by the United Nations General Assembly of the representatives of the People's Republic of China (Mainland) and its rejection of the representatives of the Republic of China (Taiwan) as the legitimate representatives of China in the United Nations was followed by a number of the specialized agencies. The People's Republic of China as a Member State soon objected to the inclusion in statistical publications of data furnished by the Republic of China. One result is that in certain fields of statistics, data for "Taiwan Province" are not included.

It may be noted, in another connection, that economic surveys, however, do make some use of estimates by the Secretariat or from other sources when official figures for some countries are lacking or are not up to date.

Another of the principal objectives of United Nations system publications is to assist the developing countries in realizing their economic and social development programs by providing manuals and guides which help their officials. Because so many publications and programs are devoted to the problems of the developing countries, it should not surprise readers of United Nations system studies and surveys to find relatively little material dealing with the United States, Canada, Japan, or other developed countries except when used as examples for developing countries. The national publications of the developed countries themselves provide, of course, a much greater amount of information on these countries than should be expected from the United Nations system. And it should be noted also that treatment of the developing countries is usually in terms of specific problems or project areas.

Now let me turn for a few minutes to International Bibliography, Information, Documentation (I.B.I.D.) and the availability of international publications.

I.B.I.D. is jointly published by the Xerox Education Group companies R. R. Bowker Company and Unipub, Inc., the exclusive U.S. national distributor for several of the UN system organizations and specializing in international publications. It is a quarterly "current awareness" service bringing under one cover information about:

- (a) priced publications of the UN system and selected unpriced publications—public information material, catalogs, bibliographies, reports—which are listed with annotations; and
- (b) subscription periodicals and selected free periodicals, which are listed with tables of contents.

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I.B.I.D. has the cooperation of UN system organizations, which supply "review" copies of their publications and issues of periodicals.

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University Microfilms, Kraus, G. K. Hall, Oceana, and others; and collections of texts, such as resolutions by UN organs, published by Oceana, and papers and addresses of the UN Secretaries-General published by Columbia University Press.

Harry N. M. Winton, Editor, I.B.I.D.

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